

## SPRING 2007 SPECIAL REPORT

# STARK INITIATIVES IN THE NEW CONGRESS



## MEDIKIDS: HEALTH CARE FOR ALL CHILDREN

**T**he State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is up for extension this year in Congress. SCHIP – called Healthy Families in California – provides coverage to some six million children nationwide in families with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid, but below 200% of poverty (\$41,300 for a family of four). California has improved upon the program, using state money to cover children up to 250% of poverty.

SCHIP has helped millions of kids, but some 60% of eligible children are still not enrolled. This is because the enrollment process is unnecessarily complex and states have a disincentive to make it any easier, as they are required to foot a portion of the bill for each newly insured child.

As a result, nearly 9 million children in the wealthiest nation in the world remain without health coverage. That is a moral disgrace and a public health epidemic. Many poor children are already malnourished and have difficulty succeeding in school. Untreated illnesses make it even more difficult for them to become healthy, educated, and productive adults.

We can do better. Rather than simply reauthorize the SCHIP program in its existing form, I propose seizing this opportunity to provide coverage for all children in America. Toward that end, I will soon



introduce the MediKids Health Insurance Act.

My legislation would create MediKids, a new federal health program modeled on Medicare. MediKids would provide benefits tailored to children, including a comprehensive prescription drug benefit.

Under MediKids, parents wouldn't have to jump through complicated enrollment and eligibility hoops to get their children covered. Instead, every child in America would automatically be eligible. If a child

is covered by their parents' employer health plan, SCHIP, or Medicaid, they could keep that coverage. MediKids would cover all other children, providing a new national safety net.

Rather than rely on states, the federal government would administer and finance the program – with the help of families who benefit. Lower-income families would have their premiums fully or partially subsidized, depending on their income.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children's Defense Fund, and many other children's advocacy organizations strongly support MediKids.

In Congress, I will work to move us from SCHIP, a partial solution, to MediKids, a complete solution that will provide health care to all children.

# MENTAL HEALTH PARITY IN MEDICARE

**D**id you know that one in three senior citizens demonstrates symptoms of depression or that the majority of Medicare beneficiaries with a disability suffer from mental illness? Sadly, older Americans also have a high rate of suicide.

In 1965, Congress created Medicare to provide universal health care to seniors and people with disabilities. Over the years, Medicare's benefits have been updated to reflect advances in medicine.

While treatment for mental illness has changed dramatically over the past five decades, Medicare's mental health benefits have remained stuck in 1965. Medicare charges a discriminatory 50% copayment for outpatient mental health treatment, caps coverage for mental health hospitalizations at a

190-day lifetime limit, and fails to cover the array of outpatient mental health services that are now the preferred treatment option.

That's why I've authored HR 1663, the Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act. This legislation would finally provide parity in Medicare between mental and physical health. It would lower the outpatient copayment to 20%, eliminate the arbitrary lifetime limit on hospital-based mental health services, and modernize the types of outpatient treatment covered.

It is past time for Medicare's mental health coverage to join the 21st century. As Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means' Subcommittee on Health, enacting this bill is one of my top priorities this year.



## CURRENCY FOR THE BLIND

Have you ever wondered why so many foreign countries have paper money of various sizes? It's because they want all people – including those who are blind or visually impaired – to be able to

recognize the value of different bills and participate in the economy.

A Federal judge recently ruled that the U.S. must start making paper currency accessible to blind Americans with some distinguishing feature by modifying the size of bills, producing a tactile mark or raising ink. The Bush Administration is appealing the decision, but rather than fight this out in the courts, our government should do the right thing.

I will introduce legislation this month to distinguish bills by trimming corners in an established pattern, with more corners for lower-value bills to prevent fraud. This could be done without having to change vending machines or bill counters, meaning the relatively small capital cost would be borne by government rather than businesses.

Katherine Skivers of Hayward is a former President of the California Council of the Blind and has been a pioneer in advocating for the rights of blind Americans. To honor her work, I've named the bill the Katherine Skivers Currency Accessibility Act.

With the number of blind and visually impaired Americans expected to double in the next 30 years, it is past time for the U.S. to join the rest of the world and make our currency accessible to all.

# PROTECTING OUR PLANET FROM GLOBAL WARMING

There is an overwhelming scientific consensus that the earth is warming as a result of human activities. Unless we take immediate action to curb our production of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, the United States and the world will face disastrous consequences.

The week of Earth Day, April 22nd, I will introduce a bill to enforce a new carbon tax, a simple solution that is easy to implement. Over five years, my bill would phase in a tax of \$50 per ton of carbon on energy producers and fossil fuel importers.

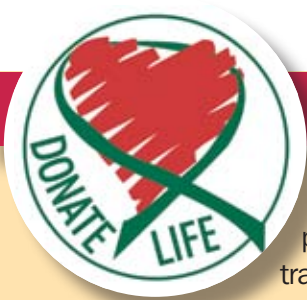
A carbon tax would provide a financial incentive for the use of clean renewable energy rather than coal



and other carbon-intensive energy sources. Economists estimate it would reduce the United States' carbon dioxide emissions by five percent in the first five years alone. This would bring us closer to Kyoto Treaty goals and encourage worldwide action in response to global warming.

One of Nancy Pelosi's first acts as Speaker was to establish a new House committee on global warming. Likewise, as Chair of the Committee on Environment and Public Works, Senator Barbara Boxer moved quickly to establish a similar subcommittee. With Congress'

new focus on global warming, the stage is set for progress on this growing threat to our planet.



## HONORING ORGAN DONORS

Every year, more than 5,000 people die while waiting for organ transplants. At present, nearly 100,000 people are waiting for a suitable organ; over 2,000 of whom are children under age 18.

To honor the brave and selfless act of organ donation and to encourage others to become donors, I've introduced HR 1764, the William H. Frist Gift of Life Congressional Medal Act. This bill would present each

organ donor or his or her surviving family with a Congressional medal of honor, commemorating their compassionate act.

This legislation is named for former Republican Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist – also a renowned cardiac surgeon – who co-authored this bill with me when he served in Congress. It has bipartisan support in both the House and Senate and we're working to see that this medal becomes a reality.

## KEY VOTES

### EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT –

**HR 800:** Provides for a majority signup process to authorize union representation. Passed the House by a vote of 241-185. **Stark voted YES.**

### CLEAN DRINKING WATER LEGISLATION –

**HR 569, HR 700, and HR 720:** Three bills to update old sewer systems, encourage innovation in water reclamation and reuse, and improve local drinking water infrastructure. Passed the House by votes of 367-58, 368-59, and 303-108. **Stark voted YES on all three.**

### IRAQ WAR SUPPLEMENTAL

#### APPROPRIATIONS BILL – HR 1591:

Provides additional funds for the War in Iraq with a proposed troop withdrawal date of August 2008. Passed the House by a vote of 218-212-1. A supporter of immediate withdrawal, **Stark voted PRESENT.**

### WOUNDED WARRIORS ACT –

**HR 1538:** Corrects serious shortcomings in our care for gravely injured veterans returning from the Iraq War. Addresses problems at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and other military health care facilities. Passed the House by a vote of 426-0. **Stark voted YES.**

### WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION ACT –

**HR 985:** Strengthens protections for federal whistleblowers to prevent retaliation against those who report waste, fraud, and abuse to authorities. Passed the House by a vote of 331-94. **Stark voted YES.**

## PETE'S SPRING TOWN MEETINGS

**SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 2007**

### UNION CITY

**9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.**

Ruggieri Senior Center  
33997 Alvarado-Niles Road

### SAN LORENZO

**10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

San Lorenzo  
Adult School Auditorium  
820 Bockman Road

### ALAMEDA

**12:00 Noon – 1:00 p.m.**

Alameda City Hall  
Council Chambers  
2263 Santa Clara Avenue

**SATURDAY, MAY 12, 2007**

### FREMONT

**9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.**

Fremont City Hall  
Council Chambers  
3300 Capitol Avenue

### SAN LEANDRO

**10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

San Leandro Library  
Dave Karp Senior Facility  
300 Estudillo Avenue

### ALAMEDA

**12:00 Noon – 1:00 p.m.**

Bay Farm Elementary School  
Multipurpose Room  
200 Aughinbaugh Way



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